

# THUNDERHEAD

## Holistic Lesson Plan

*Thunderhead* is a cumulative Level 8 piece that weaves together technical elements from earlier levels in GuitarCurriculum. It serves as a companion to *Sandías* (Level 4), both inspired by the composer's home in New Mexico. Each summer, the New Mexican landscape is crowned by towering thunderheads—massive cloud formations that appear on the distant horizon and slowly sweep across the sky. This piece captures the experience of watching those majestic structures drift overhead, leaving behind a sense of calm and coolness in the air.

Students will apply a range of techniques in this piece, including slurs, arpeggios, scale passages with right-hand alternation, upper-position reading, and full chords. Fingerings—both right and left hand—are carefully chosen and should be followed closely, particularly in upper-position sections. Teachers are encouraged to monitor fingerings throughout, as they support efficient movement and help students navigate the technical and expressive challenges of the piece with confidence and ease.

Our overarching goals for *Thunderhead* are as follows:

### Artistry

- Perform the piece expressively, with a full tone, smooth and lyrical dynamic shaping, and clear contrast between dynamic levels across sections. Shape the overall arc of the piece by building tension and energy through the first half, then gradually receding and fading as the ending approaches.
- Perform the piece with balance between parts, clearly distinguishing the melody from the accompaniment.
- Perform the piece with precise vertical alignment and rhythmic togetherness among the ensemble.

### Technique

- Sit in proper playing position (see Performance Checklist).
- Play right-hand arpeggios clearly and evenly, using correct finger sequences and preparation strategies (see Level 6 Technical Sequence).
- Play slurs (hammer-ons and pull-offs) clearly and evenly, using correct left-hand positioning and technique (see Level 5 Technical Sequence).
- Play full open-position chords
- Play harmonics at the 12th and 7th frets with clear tone.
- Play scales in upper positions on the top three strings with correct left hand fingerings consistent tone.

## Literacy

- Read and perform note values: eighth, quarter, half, whole.
- Read and perform notes on all six strings within frets 1–4.
- Read and perform notes on the treble strings in upper positions (2nd and 5th positions).
- Read and perform full “vertical” chords in open position.
- Read and perform natural harmonics at the 7th and 12th frets.

## Recommended Broad Sequence:

Rather than outlining a recommended instructional sequence, we’ve chosen to highlight the key teaching points and technical challenges to keep in mind throughout the various sections of the piece.

### Measures 1-16:

- This section features simple PIM arpeggios in Guitars 1–3, paired with simple left-hand shapes. Arpeggios should be smooth, rhythmically even, and shaped with a full, round tone and clear dynamic contour.
- Guitar 1 plays in 2nd position, with the first finger anchored on the 2nd fret. For example, the F# on the first string should be played with the first finger, the G with the second finger, and the A in measure 8 with the fourth finger.
- Slurs appear in Guitar 1 in measures 11–12 and 15–16. Be sure students use correct left-hand technique for hammer-ons and pull-offs (see Level 5 Technical Sequence), focusing on clarity and evenness throughout.

### Measures 17-24:

- This section features full and open-position chords in Guitars 2 and 3, strummed with the thumb. Left-hand fingers should remain curved, pressing the strings with the fingertips to ensure that open strings ring clearly and are not muted by a collapsed or flat finger.
- Guitar 1 remains in 2nd position. Be sure students play the E’s in measures 18, 19, and 21 using the fourth finger on the second string. While the melody is simple, it should be played expressively, following the dynamics indicated in the score.

### Measures 25-32

- Guitars 1 and 3 now use the PIMA arpeggio pattern. Use the rest on beat 3 to reset and prepare the right hand for the next arpeggio. After playing the final note of the pattern (the a finger), each finger should return to its string immediately to maintain hand position.
- Guitar 2 combines simple PIM arpeggios, slurs, and scale passages. Pay close attention to both right- and left-hand fingerings, and be sure students clearly understand which notes are connected by slurs to ensure accurate and fluid execution.

## Measures 33-40

- Guitar 1 reads this passage primarily in 5th position, with a brief shift to 4th position. The passage begins on the second string with the third finger playing F# and the fourth finger playing G. In measure 34, students will shift to 4th position to play the scale on beats 3 and 4. On the final E of the measure, they will shift back to 5th position by placing the first finger on the 5th fret of the second string, returning them to position for the remainder of the passage.
- Guitar 2 plays a PIMA arpeggio using full preparation in alternating measures. In measures with a half note on beat 3, full preparation is not used. Instead, students should use either the *i* or *m* finger to create a PIMAI or PIMAM arpeggio, maintaining consistent tone and rhythmic flow throughout.

## Measures 41-49

- This passage follows a *ritardando* in measure 40, leading into a slower tempo of 80 bpm. Guitars 1–3 use a combination of techniques, including six-note chord strumming with the thumb (*p*), linear playing in 5th position, and a blend of arpeggios and strummed textures.
- In Guitar 3, measure 42 presents a unique arpeggio that begins with the *p* finger playing each bass note, followed by *i* on the third string, *m* on the second string (with a slur from B to D), and *a* on the first string. This measure contains several technical challenges, but with focused practice, it should begin to feel like a richly embellished PIMA arpeggio.

The remainder of the piece features either recapped material or passages with similar technical challenges. Success with this piece depends on a careful balance between precision and expression: students should follow all notations and fingerings closely to support fluid and accurate execution, while also approaching each section with musicality and care. Particular attention should be given to dynamic markings, allowing the expressive shape of each phrase to come through clearly.

## Opportunities for Social Emotional Learning

Thunderheads are powerful and majestic, often bringing a mix of fear, awe, and wonder. In life, we sometimes encounter moments—especially in nature—that feel intense or overwhelming, but also beautiful and inspiring. Ask students to reflect on an experience that felt both powerful and a little scary, yet magical or moving. It could be something from nature, a place, a story, or a moment that reminded them of the beauty and power of the world around us. Invite students to share and listen to each other's stories, and to celebrate how awe-inspiring moments can shape how we see and feel.

# THUNDERHEAD

Tony Mariano

Score

$\text{♩} = 80$

Guitar 1 Level 8

Guitar 2 Level 8

Guitar 3 Level 8

G1

G2

G3

G1

G2

G3



36 *molto rit.* -----

G1 *mp* *mf* *f* *nat.*

G2 *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *p i m a* *m*

G3 *mf* *f*

$\text{♩} = 80$

41 *pont.* *sim.* H XII

G1 *f* *mf* *f* *mf*

G2 *pont.* *nat.* V<sub>3</sub> 4 ② 4

G3 *f* *(flesh)* *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

46 H VII *molto rit.* -----  $\text{♩} = 80$

G1 *p* *nat.*

G2 *nat.* *p*

G3 *pont.* *pp* *p* *nat.*

52

G1

G2

G3

*f*

57

playful  
poco pont.

G1

G2

G3

*mf*

61

rit.

G1

G2

G3

*mp*

*p*

*pp*

gliss.